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RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 8700
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1520
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 9354
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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR MEETS WITH OPPOSITION LEADER HASINA

Classified By: Ambassador Patricia T. Butenis, reason para 1.4(d).

¶1. (C) During a September 27 one-hour meeting with Ambassador to discuss her pending visit to the United States, Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina reaffirmed her commitment to discuss election reforms with the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party. Hasina stated that her notional travel dates are October 11-22 but they remain open to accommodate a possible AL-BNP dialogue. "Let's finish it in a couple of days," she said. While stressing that the AL accepted the proposal for dialogue at the outset, Hasina accused PM Zia of privately resisting it out of fear that dialogue would cost the BNP the election. Hasina repeated her claim that BNP Secretary General Bhuiyan was not sick, but was sent by PMO

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Political Secretary Harris Chowdhury to Singapore to delay dialogue.

¶2. C) At an immediately subsequent iftar with Ambassador, Hasina pressed Ambassador and the British High Commissioner to host the first meeting of the AL and BNP secretaries general at one of their homes as a "neutral venue." Ambassador urged the AL to accept the BNP proposal to meet at one of the official state guest houses, but did not rule out the possibility of inviting Jalil and Bhuiyan to meet initially at her house. On the mechanics of dialogue, Hasina said that Jalil would bring the BNP's proposals to her to discuss with the party leadership.

¶3. (C) Ambassador noted Jalil had told her earlier that neither side can expect "to get 100%." Hasina affirmed the point and then enumerated her final position:

-- The whole Election Commission must be reconstituted (just replacing Chief Election Commissioner Aziz is not enough) so that it's absolutely neutral;

-- All of the upazila election officers must be removed because they have been appointed by BNP or Jamaat Islami; politically neutral officials should be appointed in their place (Comment: Hassan's family relationship to two of the accused in Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's assassination, not his potential ties to the BNP, is the real, and very emotional, issue for Hasina. End comment); and

-- A new Chief Advisor must be appointed after consultation with the AL.

¶4. (C) Hasina also mentioned two relatively minor demands:

-- Transparent ballot boxes; and

-- A new voter list compiled with a photo of each registered voter.

15. (C) Hasina said that the AL has asked for, but not received, official voter lists. She continues to believe that the BNP does not want the AL to participate in the elections.

16. (C) Hasina asked if she could see the Secretary while in Washington, "just for a few minutes, no press." Ambassador replied that U/S Burns would more likely be available.

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